

# The LAY-MONK.

*Nil fuit unquam  
Sic impar sibi.* Hor.

From FRIDAY, December 18. to MONDAY, December 21. 1713.

NO great is the Repugnancy between the Sentiments and Actions, the Principles and Pursuits of irreligious Men, that no two Things can be more contradictory in their Nature, or inconsistent in their Operations, than an Atheist is with himself. He declares it his settled Opinion that there is no Eternal Omnipotent Mind, the existent Cause of Beings, and the Fountain of all Motion in the Universe; That therefore there is no Supreme Governour of the World, who has made Laws to constitute the Duty of Man, and restrain the Liberty he has by Nature to act according to his Inclinations, and that hence Man is an unaccountable Being, and incapable of contracting any Guilt: For where there is no Rule of Action, there can be no Deviation; where there is no Command, there can be no Disobedience. If the Atheist says he has not an arbitrary and unlimited Power over his Actions, since he acknowledges he is bound to observe the Laws of his Country, 'tis plain that Acknowledgment does not proceed from his Consciousness of any moral Obligation to obey the Magistrate; for whence can he imagine any such Obligation can arise? If there be no Divine Legislator, the Civil Magistrate may make what Laws he pleases; but what shall infuse any moral binding Force into those Commands? 'Tis evident there is no Authority to animate those Precepts, that can affect the Mind; but the Atheist submits out of Fear of Disgrace or Punishment, and owes all his Obedience to the Jail and the Gibbet.

These are the Maxims and the Creed of the Atheist; and if we compare them with the Actions of his Life, nothing will appear more absurd and inconsistent. For Instance: He is very industrious, even to Biggottry, to proselite others to his Opinions; which is very idle and unreasonable; for

this is to act without an End, and to propagate Profaneness and Irreligion, only for the Sake of doing so: What can any Man propose to himself, in becoming an Apostle of Atheism, a Planter and Spreader of Impiety? Suppose he could accomplish this Design; that he could reform the World from all Sense of Vertue, free Men from the Prejudices of Education, and extirpate from their Minds the Belief of a GOD: Suppose he had convinc'd them that their Actions shall never be brought before any Sovereign Tribunal, and that there is no future State of Retribution, what has he done but introduc'd Confusion among Men, by setting them at Liberty from all moral Obligation and Notions of Duty to each other? What has he achiev'd, but arm'd each Man against his Neighbour, and given to every one a Right to every Thing he can seize, and has Power to defend. The Good this Anti-Evangelist has produc'd to his Disciples, is that he has elevated their Nature to the Dignity of Brute Animals in this Life, and plac'd them in the comfortable View of roaming after Death in loose Atomes, thro' the infinite Void; or becoming, if collected, a Weed of the Field, or the Ingredients of a Pebble. Should the Atheist spare his Pains, and let his Neighbour continue unconverted, till he grew impenitent in Morality, and obdurate in Religion, what Harm can those Principles do him, while he entertains himself with agreeable Reflections on his Vertues here, and the delightful Expectation of Bliss hereafter? Let it be suppos'd, that these are meer imaginary Scenes of Pleasure, that have no Foundation to support them; yet still they are Pleasures, and, as the Possessor says, very great ones: And since they cannot hurt or disquiet him in this Life, and at his Death his Being is extinguish'd, when he cannot be conscious of his Error, nor regret

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his Disappointment, 'tis invidious to endeavour to dispossess him of his Enjoyments. Whence it appears that the Atheist takes a great deal of Satisfaction away from the Minds of Men, and leaves nothing to recompence the Loss.

Nor is his Practice less absurd, while he takes great Care to enlighten others, and adorn their Minds by his Ideas of Irreligion, but denies those Happy Instructions to his dearest Relations. While he labours to convert others, should he shew no Justice or Charity at Home? Why is he so unnatural as to rob his Family of their Birth-right, and not acquaint them with that unbounded Power they all have over their own Actions? That there is no Distinction of Good or Evil, no Divine Lawgiver, no Providence, no Judge, nor any Future State of Immortality, and therefore whatever Appetites and Passions they indulge, or whatever Actions they do, let them be ever so enormous or detestable in the Opinion of others, are in their own Nature innocent and inoffensive. That they may reflect upon them without the least Shame and Remorse, and have nothing to fear but the Magistrate, and the idle Censure of Persons infatuated with superstitious Principles, with the imaginary Idea of a Deity, and the groundless Phantome of a future Life.

The Atheist equally contradicts his Principles, by owning that Vertue can exist without Religion. He recommends Justice, Friendship, Gratitude and Generosity, and applauds the Love of one's Country, and Goodwill to Mankind, and on the contrary condemns Injustice, Oppression, Fraud, Breach of Faith and Ingratitude. I have heard a profest Atheist in a Rage call a Man a Villain, who indeed deserv'd that Name, but not from the Atheist, who must renounce his Principles, before he can fix a Name of Reproach upon the worst of Men; none according to his Scheme being capable of Wickedness. I have likewise been surpriz'd to hear a Man entirely Irreligious, reproach another as Immoral and Unjust; I would fain know what Idea they form in their Minds of Immorality, who allow of no Divine Law or Natural Obligation. For by this, as is very evident, all Foundations of Distinction between Good and Evil, Moral and Immoral, are utterly destroy'd.

Thus the Atheist in Speculation is the Reverse to one in Practice. This confesses a Deity in his Words, and denies him in his Life; the other confesses a Deity by his Actions, and denies him in his Words. The practical Atheist is much worse than his Principles, and the Speculative much better. One takes a great deal of Liberty, which his Opinions do not allow; and the other does much good, which his Principles do not enjoin. The Reason of it is, that no Man is in this Life perfectly wicked, as no Man is perfectly good; and the Atheist is not able by his utmost Endeavours so far to eradicate the Distinction of Good and Evil from his Mind, to extinguish the Light of Nature, and suppress the Dictates of Reason, as to acquire a Disposition capable of enjoying the Fruits of Atheistical Liberty in its full Latitude; and therefore in despite of his Notions, that give him an unlimited Extent, he still retains some good Instinct, and does many useful, and as to the Matter of them, praise-worthy Actions.

The Distrust and Terror when alone by Night, and the timorous Apprehensions of Death, which have been remarkable in great Patrons and Promoters of Atheism, cannot with good Reason be accounted for from irreligious Maxims. No more can the sordid Avarice and Desire of immense Possessions, in pursuit of which some great Leaders of the impious Sect deny themselves not only the Pleasures, but the Conveniences of Life, unless they are procur'd at another's Cost. For these Men should rather draw this Conclusion from their Premises, since Death will extinguish all Delights and Enjoyments for ever, let us improve the present Hour, *Let us eat and drink, for to morrow we shall dye.* And this indeed is the Deduction, which the greatest part draw from their Principles, and act in Conformity to it.

The vehement Desire of Esteem and Reputation, of being well spoken of, and applauded for their Learning, Penetration, and superior Wit, and what is yet more absurd, for their Vertue too, of which by their Doctrines they are utterly incapable, confirms the Truth of what I have asserted.

But what more than all demonstrates the Atheist to be inconsistent with himself, is his Eagerness to extend his Fame beyond the Grave, and to be mention'd with Honour after Death. Let an Atheist ask himself, Whether he is contented to be transmitted to Posterity, under the Character of a senseless stupid Animal, a Man of no Honour or Probity, an infamous Lyar, a Traytor to his Prince, a Hater of his Country, and, in short, a consummate Villain? If he is not willing to be thus represented after Death, this Concern for his Fame and Credit, when his Nature is dissolv'd, and he, as he believes, shall be dispers'd in common Air, is by no Means reconcileable to his irreligious Maxims.

Nor does he act less in Contradiction his Opinions, in the Care he takes about the Decency of his Interment, and a due Respect to be paid to his Dead Body. I cannot think an Atheist would be unconcern'd, if he were assur'd that, after his Death, his Body would be dragg'd naked through the Streets, and then expos'd to be eaten by Dogs, or lye rotting on a Dunghill. *Mexentius* is introduc'd by *Virgil* into his Poem, under the Character of an Atheist, a Contemner of the Gods, and a Derider of Religious Rites. When he was conquer'd by *Aeneas*, and lay on the Ground, expecting the Stroke of Death, he thus entreats him: "If any Request may be granted to a vanquish'd Enemy, this only I ask: Suffer my Body to be Buried. I am odious to my own Nation, that surround me; defend me from their Fury, and let me be laid in the same Sepulchre with my Son." Had *Virgil* form'd this Character upon the Maxims and Opinions of an Atheist, and drawn the Manners accordingly, it had been a manifest Error to have made him so much concern'd about his Dead Body, his Decent Funeral, and his lying in the same Tomb with *Lausus*; but this Judicious Writer copy'd the Original as it is, and not what in reason it should be; and therefore observing that irreligious Men were thus absurd and inconsistent with themselves, he drew an Atheist as he found him in his Manners, contradictory to his own Tenets.

